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Letter dated 3 March 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 3 March 1998 addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Aytuğ Plümer, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Hüseyin E. ÇELEM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Letter dated 3 March 1998 from Mr. Avtuğ Plümer addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 17 February 1998 addressed to you by the Greek Cypriot representative at the United Nations which contains allegations regarding cultural property in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (A/52/794-S/1998/133).

The Greek Cypriot representative once again refers to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as an "occupied area". I wish to underline that the only occupation in Cyprus is the 35-year-old usurpation and occupation of the legitimate seat of government of the once bi-communal Republic of Cyprus by the Greek Cypriot regime in the South.

Unfounded allegations of the "systematic plundering" of cultural property in Northern Cyprus have been amply dealt with in our previous communications addressed to you, most recently in my letter dated 22 January 1998 (A/52/778-S/1998/74). I will therefore confine myself to highlighting the salient aspects of the matter in question.

Contrary to what is claimed, it is the Greek Cypriot side that has always tried to eradicate all traces of the Turkish-Muslim heritage of Cyprus, in particular during the years between 1963 and 1974, when they attempted to "cleanse" the island of its ethnic Turkish population through brute violence and oppression. During this tragic period, mosques, shrines and other places of Muslim worship in 103 villages across the island were destroyed. Today, the Greek Cypriot administration is still perpetuating a policy of religious intolerance and showing undisguised contempt towards the Islamic heritage in South Cyprus.

Regarding the allegations made in the said letter of the Greek Cypriot representative over the conversion of a number of churches into mosques or their being given new functions related to the needs of contemporary life, it should be re-emphasized that conservation of historic buildings through use is not only permissible but also recommended under relevant international instruments.

One cannot help but ponder the question as to what the Greek Cypriot representative, who readily notes the argument concerning the reuse of historic buildings, would have to say about the Greek Cypriot side's wilful destruction of 103 mosques during the period from 1963 to 1974 and whether that action conforms to the "international law" and relevant conventions that he so keenly pays lip service to.

The Turkish Cypriot side has done and is doing everything within its means to preserve the cultural heritage of Northern Cyprus. Turkish Cypriot authorities have invited international organizations to extend financial and technical assistance to Northern Cyprus with a view to supporting its efforts towards the preservation of its cultural heritage. The Greek Cypriot side, for

its part, is doing its utmost to prevent these international organizations from extending any assistance to Northern Cyprus. This is a clear illustration of the hypocrisy and insincerity of the Greek Cypriot administration.

The Greek Cypriot side has systematically attacked, destroyed or treated with utter disrespect cultural and religious monuments, places of worship and other elements of culture belonging to the Turkish-Muslim heritage of the island. In view of the above, the Greek Cypriot side's allegations regarding cultural property appear to be an attempt to cover up its own misdeeds, past and present, in Cyprus.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Aytuğ PLÜMER
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus